Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Editorial

Improving the Newsletter

I am conscious that there is considerable room for improvement in the quality of this publication, and I intend to take the following steps. On the suggestion of Lavkumar Khacher, I will avoid the large number of references which usually accompany articles which are published. In some cases the "references are longer than the main piece". I will only include such references which are really important. One assumes that most writers consult the Handbook, the Pictorial Guide and other books before they put themselves into print.

The other step which I want to take is to shorten articles where necessary to make them more effective. Unnecessary verbiage often detracts from the value of the piece. If any contributor wants his article to be reproduced verbatim, he must write to the Editor, in which case it will either be accepted or rejected.

I see that a number of contributors to the Newsletter have now started to write for the Oriental Bird Club publications. This is most heartening for it shows that the Newsletter has acted as a stepping stone for novices to advance on the ladder of ornithology. But I hope they will not forget the Newsletter completely.

I must confess that I continue to use the old English names of birds and quite often the old scientific names. I don't intend to change the old English names whatever the experts might say. In course of time I hope I will be able to introduce the latest scientific jargon as far as scientific names are concerned.

Finally, may I repeat an appeal which I made some time ago. The Newsletter should be a source of pleasure for birdwatchers and instead of merely sending out a list of birds seen in a locality, it would be nice to get an account of the environment and of the many beautiful scenes which birdwatchers are privileged to encounter during their outings. This is what made the writing of ornithologists and naturalists in the early years of this century so interesting.

Watching Common Birds

The usual tendency of a birder on sighting a common bird is to make a mental or pencil note about its presence and that is about all. But one could attempt to be more involved. For example, when we hear one or more

Commenting on NL Vol.36, No.1 Jan/Feb 1996, may I suggest we omit references - for instance, space on references following the note "flocks of green Avadavat in Kanha Tiger Reserve" is as great as the note itself. It almost sound like when I attended a seminar in Kuwait, all the Arab delegates invoked a common preamble. Here we have the Salim Ali — Ripley. Martin Woodcock being invoked each time. Rather depressing really. In larger articles this does not cause discomfort, but for a note on sighting something? Really it is taking things too far. Let us not overdo the scientific nightmare.

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POND HERONS AND OTTERS. *G MAHESWARAN, Stork Ecology Project, Centre of Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002, India*

On 8 and 9 March, 1996 I saw an interesting scene in Banketaal of Dudwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh. In the morning around 10.15 hrs on 8 March I saw 10 pond herons (*Ardeola grayii*) following an actively foraging family of Smooth Indian otter (*Lutra perspicillata*). There were 6 Otters (two adult and four young ones) foraging in the fringes of the wetland where wildrice (*Oryza* sp.) dominate the vegetation. All the otters moved towards the inundated grass area and caught a number of fish. When the otters moved around the fish and flies got disturbed and became victims of the pond herons. Whenever the otters moved, the pond herons followed. The Otters did not show any aggressiveness towards the pond herons. The next day also I observed a similar scene.

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COMMENTS ON HIS PREVIOUS ARTICLE. *S ASHOK KUMAR, Plot No.491, Road No.10, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad 500 033.*

[at the request of the Editor the author comments on his article in the previous issue, explaining why there is so much variation in the bird life of three water bodies all seemingly similar]

Durgamma is a fairly large tank, containing fish, crustaceans, frogs, tadpoles, insects etc. The presence of little cormorants, grey herons, egrets, cotton teal, marsh harrier and kingfishers is indicative of the adequate availability of food notwithstanding the fishing operations conducted by the Cooperative Society. My enquiries reveal that these operations are carried out on a moderate scale. This tank appears to be the homeground of cotton teals as evidenced by the presence of chicks. The absence of other species of duck is obviously due to the fact that Miapur tank, which is just 6 kms away as the crow flies, provides a better supply of food including floating algae. This explains the presence of a large concentration of waterfowl in Miapur tank.

During the Asian Water Fowl Census, 1996, I had counted 17 little cormorants, 8 pond herons, 15 cattle egrets, 4 little egrets, 4 pintails, 109 cotton teal, 4 shovellers, 10 garganey teal, 16 redcrested pochards, 7 coots, 7 whitebreasted waterhens, 10 blackwinged stilts and 100 + unidentifed ducks. The other factor for the presence of so many waterfowl is the locational advantage — the tank abuts the National Highway No.9 and therefore it is in full public gaze discouraging poaching. Generally roadside wetlands in public gaze, provide a safe haven for birds.

Tummadi tank in close proximity to Durgamma tank is a tiny pond used by little cormorants, cotton teal and marsh harriers as a secondary feeding ground. They do not seem to stay put for they were not found in the late evening consecutively for three days.

The lack of floating vegetation and reed growth is perhaps the reason for the absence of purple moorhens and whitebreasted waterhen in Durgamma tank. These birds are however found in Tummadi and Bachpalli tanks which provide an ideal habitat with their vast floating vegetation and prolific reed growth. I presume that the few pintails, cotton teals and blackwinged stilts are the ones from Miapur tank that have strayed into Bachpalli tank.

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RECENT SIGHTING OF REDNECKED GREBE AND MARBLED TEAL IN ASSAM. *HILLALJYOTI SINGHA, C/o Late Dr B Hazarika, Pani Gaon, Poly Road, Nagaon 782 001*

Referring to the short note — "Red-necked Grebe in Assam — a new record" by Anwaruddin Choudhury (NLBW 1996, Jan/Feb 36(1): 13-14), I would like to give more information. On 18 January 1996, I led a team for waterfowl census conducted by AWB and IWRB to Laokhowa wildlife sanctuary (26.29 N, 92.45' E approx.) 20 km north-east from Nagaon town. In the morning we counted wetland birds in Saraloni beel (area 5 sq km; waterbody 3.5 sq km) — one of the largest beels in the sanctuary. In addition to 23 species of water-birds including greyheaded lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* and blackheaded gull *Larus ridibundus* in large number, we saw two unidentified grebes. We referred to the Pictorial Guide (1994) and 'A Field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia' (Wild Bird Society of Japan, 1993) and were delighted to discover them to be rednecked grebe *Podiceps griseigena*. None of us had seen the bird before. They were in nonbreeding plumage. Laokhowa WLS is around 70 km from Pabitora WLS where Shri CR Bhobora had photographed two Rednecked Grebes in 1992-93.

Again on 21st January 1996, I went to Samaguri beel (62 Ha), 20 km east from Nagaon town for the same waterfowl census. The beel (26.26' N, 93.25' E approx.) is an oxbow lake very near to the 37 national highway and is famous for lesser whistling teal *Dendrocygna javanica* and cotton pygmy goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*. We counted 19 species of aquatic birds including fulvous whistling teal *Dendrocygna bicolor*. But we were surprised to see one marbled teal *Marmaronetta angustriostris*. It was swimming with a small flock of lesser whistling teal and was quite discernible among them. Then I realised that a few minutes earlier I had seen another bird in flight. We observed the swimming bird for more than half an hour. Prasanta Bordoloi took some of its photographs from different angles. This bird is a winter visitor to and uncommon in Assam (Choudhury, 1990). Prior to me Prof PC Bhattacharjee and Prasanta Saikia of Gauhati University had seen one Marbled